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EVOLUTION

OF

The Jail of McLean County

ILLINOIS

By

Ezra M. Prince

Secretary of the McLean County Historical Society

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Bloomington, Illinois

Pantagraph Printing and Stationery Company

1899

To

The Conference of Charities and Correction

of

The State of Illinois

Bloomington, Illinois, November 1 and 2

1899

EVOLUTION OF THE JAIL OF M'LEAN COUNTY.

Believing a history of the jails of McLean County would be both interesting and profitable to the Conference of Charities and Correction and all interested in "prison reform," the Secretary of the McLean County Historical Society has prepared the following sketch of the five jails of McLean County.

THE FIRST JAIL—1832.

McLean County was organized April 28, 1831, with a population of about 2,300 to 2,500. At the December term of that year the County Commissioners' Court voted to erect a jail, and at the January term, 1832, the contract for it was let to William Dimmitt for $331. It was situated on the north line of the Court House Square, midway between Main and Center streets, facing south. It was 16 by 16 feet, two stories, one room below and one above; the upper room was used for those imprisoned for debt and minor offenses and the lower room for those accused or convicted of the more serious crimes. The building, walls, floors and ceilings were hewed oak logs; the roof was covered with split shingles four feet long. The floor logs of the upper room were also the ceiling of the lower room. They extended north and south across the building, four logs in the center of this floor extending four feet beyond the south side of the building, making a platform 4 by 4 feet. From the southwest corner of the building stairs extended to this platform. At the head of the stairs, and opening into the upper room from the platform, was a thick, heavy, oak door with heavy hinges and a big lock. This was the only door in the building, the only other outside opening was a window in the east end of each room about fifteen inches square, about five feet above the floor, made of frames with heavy iron bars up and down and crossways inserted in the frames which were spiked into the openings in the logs. In the floor of the upper room was a trapdoor. When a prisoner was incarcerated in the lower room he was taken up the stairs into the upper room, the trapdoor opened, a ladder put down and the prisoner thrust down into the inner darkness of the dungeon, the ladder removed, the trapdoor closed and locked. There was a vault below the lower floor, a small hole cut in the log floor and a suitable seat connected with it. There was, however, no such convenience in the upper room. At first there was no railing to the stairs, but at the January Term, 1836, the commissioners appointed Dr. Isaac Baker "to have the steps leading into the upper part of the jail and platform strongly bannistered or railed for greater safety."

The writer has examined the county commissioners' record during the whole time this building was used as a jail, and find no supplies for the jail of any kind, except "dieting prisoners," and "one quilt and two blankets, $7," for which the sheriff presented a bill June 7, 1836. For three or four years it seems to have served its purpose well, so far as the records show. Prisoners were few and hardy, and men who had

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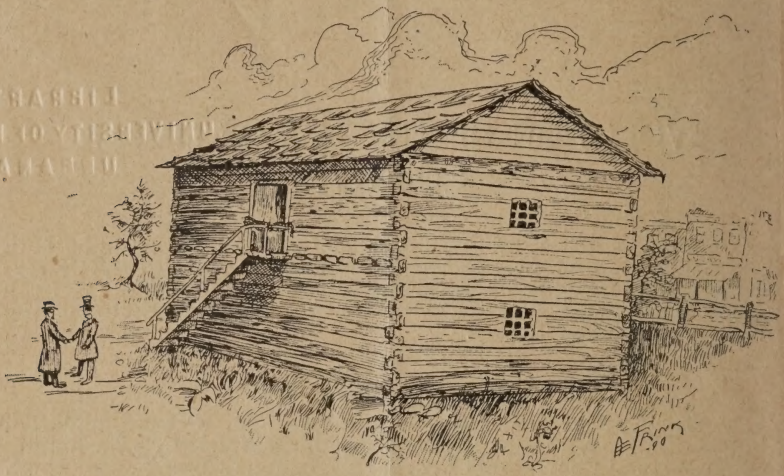


FIRST JAIL.

SECOND JAIL.

slept in cabins of rough, unhewed logs did not seriously object to the draughts that came through the chinks of hewed logs. July 4, 1836, was the first recorded "jail delivery." One Dick Morrow had bought a lot of saddlery goods of Benjamin Haines, one of Bloomington's merchants, made it up into saddles, sold them, and refused to pay Haines, who sued him, and imprisoned him for non-payment of the execution. When the key was turned on Morrow, he told the sheriff he would be out to help him celebrate the 4th of July, then approaching, and early that morning the people saw a rope, made out of his bed clothes, dangling from the upper window of the jail, the iron bars of which he had so bent as to admit of his crawling out of the window, and he was soon mounted on his pony, that he irreverently named St. John the Baptist, inquiring for the sheriff, saying he wanted to show him a weak place in the jail, and entertaining the crowd with his buffoonery. Probably other escapes followed, for September, 1837, J. R. & R. Fell were allowed $35.24 for iron and smith work on the jail, and Lewis Bunn $54.40 for iron locks and sundry repairs on the jail, and December, 1837, J. R. & R. Fell were allowed $9.55 for smith work and jail irons, and Haines & Co. for log chain and two locks for the jail. The jail irons were probably handcuffs or ankle locks.

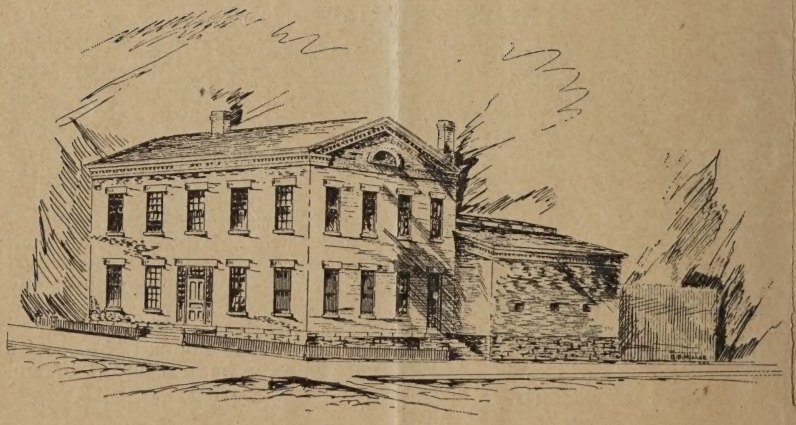
The log chain was used as an additional fastening to the door. After it was locked it was fastened with the log chain and a heavy padlock. The iron work in 1837 was probably strips of iron spiked to the logs constituting the lower floor, through which, it is probable, prisoners had escaped. But it was evidently unsafe, for in December, 1837, Henry Miller presented a bill for guarding the jail, and December 8, 1837, the commissioners find the jail was "unfit for use or repairs," and after that sometimes prisoners were sent to the Tazewell county jail, and sometimes they were guarded in this jail. July 6, 1839, the commissioners entered into a contract with Dr. Isaac Baker for a new jail.

THE SECOND JAIL—1840.

Was situated on lot 1, block 35, Allin Gridley & Pricket's addition to Bloomington, the southwest corner of Center and Market streets, which lot Asahel Gridley conveyed to the county commissioners and their successors in office July 16, 1839, in consideration of $25—at that time the population of the county was 6,565. The contract for the building was dated July 6, 1839, with a supplementary contract December, 1839. It was 34 feet east and west, by 14 north and south, and 16 feet from the brick foundation to the eaves. It consisted of two "buildings" or rooms on the ground floor, each 14 feet square, with an entry between the rooms 6 feet wide. There was a brick foundation 12 inches thick, with a foundation of two thicknesses of hewed timbers 12 inches square, the upper course of timbers being the floor of the "prison." The walls and ceilings of the two lower rooms were hewed logs 1 foot square, the lower story 10 feet high in the clear, and three rounds of timber above the floor of the second story. The logs of the first jail are said to have been used in the construction of the second.

The top part was finished like a dwelling house with a window in each gable, this part of the building being used as the residence of the jailer. The lower rooms were connected together by the foundation timbers which extended across the entry.

THIRD JAIL.



FOURTH JAIL

The only entrance to the building was through the "front" door opening into the entry on the south. The entry ran through to the north wall of hewed logs which continued from one end of the building to the other. This "front door" was a double door, the outer one a heavy oak door three inches thick with big lock and big brass nob to it, which, when the jail was vacant, the boys used as a "shinning mark" for their rifles. The inner door was heavy bar iron crossed and riveted and fastened with another big lock. There was also a heavy door from the entry to each of the prison rooms; in each of these latter doors was a grated window about fifteen inches square and opposite these grated windows were grated windows of the same size in the east and west ends of the building, the iron gratings being put in the logs as the building was built. The original contract called for a pit in each room twelve feet deep, walled with brick, three feet in diameter and a seat suitable for the same, but this was abandoned and in lieu of it an "outlet" "strongly guarded with iron bars" was made through the north wall of each room with a suitable seat to each "outlet" on the inside of said rooms. These outlets probably connected with vaults outside the building. The north, south and west sides of "dungeon" room, on the outside of the logs, were nailed ten feet high with eight-penny nails every two inches over the side space, before the weatherboarding was put on; the front door and the doors from the entry to the dungeon room were also filled with nails. The "dungeon" room was undoubtedly the west room, for the contract required the logs of this room to be nailed with eight-penny nails on the outside of the logs, ten feet high. The east room was doubtless designed for "poor debtors" and those accused of minor offenses. The walls of the dungeon room were lined with one and a half inch plank put on with four-inch spikes in squares of three inches all over the walls, and both floors were floored on the timbers with plank one and a quarter inch thick, strongly nailed down with good joints. The building was "enclosed" with dressed weatherboarding and painted red. In the entry was a ladder leading to the second story. There was also in the "entry" a large "Franklin" stove which was the only means of heating the lower rooms.

This building was used as a jail until 1849 when the third jail, on the northwest corner of the Court House Square was ready for occupancy. The contract price for the building was $1,500. In June, 1851, the use of it was granted to the city of Bloomington for a calaboose. It was torn down in 1877 when the fourth jail was erected on that lot.

THIRD JAIL—1848.

August 31, 1848, the county contracted with William F. Flagg to build the third jail, which cost $2,216. It was on the northwest corner of the Court House Square. It consisted of a two-story brick building 20 by 41 feet, facing west on Center street, the first story 9 feet in the clear, and the second 8, with an ell one story on the east side of the north part of the main building, consisting of a kitchen 16 by 16 and a wood house 8 by 16, and a tight plank stockade 25 by 25 feet, 12 feet high, in the corner, made by the main building and the ell. In the picture of this jail accompanying this sketch the ell and wood house are not seen, as it was thought best to take a picture which would show the front, the jail and stockade, or the prison part, rather than the residence part. In the center of the main building running east and west was an entry 8 feet wide, with a door at each end, the east door opening into the stockade. On the north side of the entry were stairs leading to the second floor. On the south of the entry was the jail part of the

FIFTH JAIL.

building, consisting of two rooms, the lower one for criminals and the upper for poor debtors. Inside of the brick shell constituting the outer walls, on the lower floor was a room 15½ by 12 feet in the clear, laid up with square timbers 12 by 12 inches, floor, sides and ceiling. The walls, floor, ceiling and door jambs were all lined with iron about 1-16 of an inch thick, and all ceiled with oak plank 2 inches thick and 12 inches wide, spiked on with 6-inch spikes, four to each log, through the sheet iron. There was a small grated window on the east, opening into the stockade. The poor debtors' room was like the lower jail room, except it did not have the iron casing between the logs and oak planking. The jail doors were of two thicknesses of 2-inch plank with the iron casing between the planks, with a diamond hole near the top large enough to admit of food for prisoners, with an iron door to cover the same, with a padlock to fasten it. The hinges to the cell doors were of bar iron 3 inches wide and 1½ inches thick, to reach across the door and screwed on from the outside with ¾-inch bolts and headed down on the inside and fastened with a big padlock. The water-closet was in the stockade. The windows, except the small grated windows of the prison rooms, had outside or "venetian" blinds. There were no windows on the west side of the prison rooms. The blinds appearing there were "blind blinds," there being the usual casings for windows, but no windows. At the head of the stairs was the jailer's bed room. The jail rooms were both heated by grates. There was no furniture in either room except the straw bed and bedding and pail of water and dipper and probably a wooden chair. This jail gave way to the fourth jail in 1857, but was used for an office some ten years longer before it was torn down. The sheriff's office remained in this building until the court house was completed, in 1878, since which it has remained in that building.

FOURTH JAIL 1857.

The fourth jail, a brick building, was erected in 1857 on Lot 1 Block 35, Allin Gridley and Pricket's addition, the location of the second jail, which was torn down to make way for this one. The building, somewhat altered, is still standing at the corner of Center and Market streets. It cost $13,150 and consisted of the sheriff's residence, 32 by 42, two stories, fronting east on Center street. The northwest room of the first floor was the jailer's office, the room above it, the "poor debtors'" room, was used for women prisoners when there were any, which was seldom. The jail was a one-story brick building adjoining on the west the jailer's office, 32 feet on Market street by 26 feet wide, north and south. In 1868 a thick layer of cement grout was placed under the jail floor to prevent prisoners escaping through the floor. On the north side were ventilating holes about six inches square, the air passing under the floor of the iron "box"—but for some reason this ventilation was a failure. There was a double door in the east end of the jail opening into the jailer's office, a barred iron door next the jail and a wooden door next the office. Also a "peep hole" through which the jailer in his office could watch the prisoners. There was a window in the west end opening into the stockade. The interior arrangements of the jail are well described in a report of George Perrin Davis, Chairman of the Committee on Public Buildings of the Board of Supervisors to that body, December 4, 1879, condemning its further use. "The jail is an iron box in which is a hall 30 feet long. 10 feet wide and 8 feet high, with five cells on each side 6 by 7 feet with bunks for two persons. In the west end is the only window which in cold weather must be closed. The ceil-

ing of the hall is a grating opening into a low garret in which are ventilators." The top, bottom and sides of the cells were boiler iron cold in winter and hot in summer. The room was heated by a large stove. The only furniture besides the iron "bunks" or beds and straw mattresses were a dipper and an iron bench in the hall. There was a water-closet in the northwest cell connecting with a sewer. At first this was supplied with water from a tank on the top of the jail which was filled from a well on the lot. There was also a lavatory in this cell connected with this tank. In 1876, Bloomington established its system of waterworks with which the jail closet was connected and the tank on the roof removed.

When built this was considered a model jail as doubtless its predecessors were considered when they were built. But the population of the county increased rapidly from about 22,000 in 1857 when this jail was built to 28,772 in 1860, 53,988 in 1870 and 60,100 in 1880, and *pari passu* with the growth of the county the number of its criminals increased. So that a jail intended for only ten inmates at times had as many as forty. In this little room were herded the hardened criminal, the boy who had only taken his first step in a downward career and sometimes the insane held for temporary detention. September 17, 1868, the Committee on Public Buildings reported the jail unsafe and December 4, 1879, the Committee on Public Buildings reported the jail, "insufficient in capacity and in strength to safely hold the prisoners, only seven cells available for prison use" and insanitary. The iron of which the "box" and cells were made had become rotten; there had been several escapes, in December, 1878, seven prisoners digging their way out and escaping. As a makeshift the northeast room of the first floor of the main building was lined with 2 by 4 oak and used as a cell room for the boys and minor criminals, but the building had long outgrown its usefulness, being insanitary, unsafe, too small and ill arranged, and March 8, 1881, the contracts were made for the fifth and last in the series of the McLean County jails.

FIFTH JAIL—1882.

This is a large and imposing building of brick, with limestone trimmings, built in 1882, at a cost of about $72,000. It is situated on a lot fronting 100 feet on Madison street by 198 on Monroe street. It consists of the sheriff's residence, 68 by 55 feet, and the main jail building in the rear, 61.6 by 59 feet; and in the southwest corner of the premises is a commodious brick stable. The accompanying sketch will give a general idea of the whole building.

As to the residence part, without going into unnecessary details it is sufficient to say that the first floor, in addition to a boys' prison, with four cells, and a jailer's office and large rear hall, contains a large front hall, a reception room, sitting room, bed room, pantry and kitchen. On the second floor, in addition to a room for the temporary detention of the insane, a large rear hall, a women's prison with four cells, and a hospital, are a front hall, four chambers, store room, bath room and closets; and in the attic are five chambers, hall and closets.

The jail part, with which we are more particularly concerned, is in the rear of the main building. The cell room, inside, is 44.6 feet in length, east and west, 43.3 feet in width, 26 feet high. In the center is a stack of cells, three tiers in height, on a concrete foundation 9 feet thick. The floor of the cell room is limestone, 8 inches thick,

resting on concrete; the walls are lined with stone 8 inches thick, and the ceiling is of stone 8 inches thick, upon which, over the cell stack, are bars of chilled steel, 2½ inches wide by three-fourths of an inch thick, kept in place by 3 feet of solid masonry. The cells in the boys', women's and main prison are 5 by 8 feet, and 8 feet high, constructed of stone, a single stone for each floor, each side and each ceiling. The doors consist of 1¼-inch rods, set in five cross-bars 3 by three-fourths of an inch thick, are locked separately, and each tier of six cells together. In each cell are canvas hammock cots. Between the cell stack and the north and south walls are corridors 12 feet wide. The north and south halves of the cell room are separated by iron grated screen partition. There are two tiers of windows on each side of the jail, the lower 8 feet above the jail floor; these windows are double-barred, and afford ample light, and by opening them in the summer the cell room is quickly cooled and ventilated. Ventilation is also provided for the cell room, cells, and between the cells, by an efficient system of ventilation through the boiler stack or chimney. It is amply provided with bath-room, lavatory, water closet and drinking water accommodations. There is an observation and "peep hole" into the jail from the jailer's office, and also from the back hall of the first floor and from the second floor, so that the cell room is at all times, day and night, under the immediate oversight of the jailer.

The whole building is heated by steam and lighted by gas. The only entrance to the cell room is through the jailer's office to the rear hall, and through that to the prisoners' ante-room, and from that to the cell room. A resolute sheriff could hold at bay a mob for a long time, and it is quite as difficult for a prisoner to escape through these tripple locked doors. This jail has been in the charge of Jacob W. Swain for the past sixteen years, during which time no person has escaped from the cell room.

RECAPITULATION.

The first jail was based on a single idea—the detention of the prisoner. His comfort did not enter into the consideration of the authorities. The second jail advanced a step beyond that; the weather-boarding kept out the blasts of winter and the Franklin fire-place in the entry tempered the wintry winds, and the "out-let" arrangement must have been an improvement on the vault under the first jail and the stench that must have arisen from it. The third jail with its cheerful grates and outside closet was an immense improvement on its predecessors.

The fourth was an improvement in the water-closet, lavatory, ventilation, bunk, women's room, and later the separate room for boys. The fifth is in every respect—safety, cleanliness, heating, and ventilation, and adequate provision for the separate confinement of boys, women, insane, and the sick—an immense improvement upon all the rest. So far as the safe keeping of the prisoners and their comfort is concerned, nothing seems to be lacking. The next step in the evolution of the jail will be to provide suitable employment, manual labor, for the prisoners, for it is ever true that "Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do."

Playing cards, the prisoners' chief amusement, is not ennobling, as a permanent occupation. The primal curse, "in the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread" was the greatest blessing that ever befell man, and it is unfair to deprive even the criminal classes of their full

share of that blessing, and the final step will come through their education, education of the intellect by which with their manual labor training they can earn their living, and moral education through which they will cease to desire to prey upon their fellow men. To this end must we come before we shall find out what to do with the defective and criminal classes.

The writer has taken great pains through correspondence and minute inquiry to obtain reliable information of our early jails, and we believe the above description may be accepted as accurate and correct.

THANKS.

For a full and accurate description of the first jail, the writer is indebted to Mr. Adam Guthrie and Mr. Sidney D. Baker. For a description of the second jail to the same gentlemen and Mr. Thomas J. Bunn. For that of the third to Mr. Joseph H. Moore, who was the last sheriff to occupy it, and to Mr. James Goodheart, who tore it down. For many details as to the fourth jail to Mr. Gustave Lange, Mr. James Goodheart and Mr. Joseph Ator, sheriffs at the time it was used as a jail. Also to Mr. Dwight E. Frink, assistant city editor of the Bulletin, for a drawing of the first jail. To Mr. A. L. Pillsbury and Mr. D. C. Chaffee, architects, for drawings of the second and third jails. To Mr. George H. Miller, architect, for a drawing of the fourth jail and loan of the plans of the fifth jail, and especially to the Pantagraph Printing & Stationery Company for reproducing these pictures and printing this pamphlet without charge. To all assisting in its preparation the Historical Society returns its sincerest thanks.

EZRA M. PRINCE,
Secretary of the McLean County Historical Society.

Bloomington, Ill., November 1, 1899.

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